Wildlife Category Review

Final Review of 2009 Proposals

ISRP 2009-17

May 19, 2009

**Programmatic Comments**

Programmatic comments fall into two categories: issues of substance within the reviews and the review process itself. We commented on many of these same programmatic themes in past reviews, for example, HEP and monitoring and evaluation (M&E). We summarize, cite, and expand on those earlier comments here. In addition, the categorical review approach allowed us to compare similar management approaches across many projects and this highlighted several new programmatic issues, such as weed control.

## *Substantive Issues*

**Research, Monitoring, Evaluation and Crediting**

In past reviews we recommended that the program evaluate where and when habitat restoration efforts increase or sustain fish and wildlife populations and at the same time maintain or increase biodiversity. Previous reviews also recommended that M&E of extensive active management (including comparison with passive management) should be emphasized to better understand when the high cost of such ongoing actions is actually justified. Not much progress has been made in this area. The ISRP continues to recommend that overarching coordinated monitoring be used to evaluate effectiveness of alternative land management practices (strategies) (ISRP 2005-141). The ISRP makes specific recommendations below.

**Interaction between wildlife crediting and monitoring**

Previously, the ISRP recommended that the Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) be used only as an initial scoring system for mitigation agreements (ISRP 2006-4a2 and 2007-13). HEP should not be used for biological (effectiveness) monitoring (ISRP 2006-4a). However, some wildlife proposals treat HEP as an effectiveness monitoring method when it is used in followup assessments, even though it is being called crediting. HEP is a tool to assess parcels and assign credit for fulfilling mitigation obligations, but this use of HEP is confused with biological or effectiveness monitoring. Consistent use of the terminology of “crediting” or “accounting” when referring to HEP and biological or effectiveness monitoring when referring to actual measures or survey data would help to communicate this distinction.

The institutionalization of HEP has created a major and perpetual program expense. It has been stated that HEP, and perhaps IBIS, HAB, and CHAP have a role in subbasin plans. There has been no comprehensive scientific review and comparison of these and other possible means of crediting. Among the suggested solutions is an ISAB review of current and other prospective methods, or a targeted solicitation for either a comparative study or proposed alternate solutions. The objective would be to ensure the Program uses the most scientifically rigorous crediting procedure available. There is also the opportunity to more closely align crediting and effectiveness monitoring, for more efficient and scientifically consistent Program operation. An alternate resolution may lie in the trend toward negotiated settlements.

**Status of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) and results reporting**

The goal for wildlife monitoring should be adaptive management, scientific use of measurable project results to continually evaluate and improve project outcomes. During the recent review by the ISRP, the lack of monitoring, evaluation, and analyses of biological results were the most common reasons for a requested response. With longer funding cycles, M&E and adaptive management reporting will become even more critical to justifying and evaluating projects. The ISRP did a quick comparison of the status of results reporting in the 2009 proposals with its analysis of results reporting in FY 2007-09 proposals for continuing projects. The earlier analysis was included in our Retrospective Report 2006 (ISRP 2007-1). All of the projects with adequate M&E programs reporting results in our FY 2007-09 analysis continued to adequately report. The Pine Creek project is an excellent example of results reporting, as are several others. Those projects needing some improvement in results reporting showed a range of responses. Among the projects most critically needing results, three remain in that status, one is promising improvement during this project cycle, and one was split into a number of individual projects with monitoring programs ranging from excellent to vague. In our individual project reviews, we offer specific guidance to a number of projects. In cases where needed results are expected or promised during the current funding cycle, we request a mid-term review to encourage sponsors to collect and analyze the monitoring data that they need to assess progress towards their objectives, document successes, evaluate the effectiveness of their management, and provide a basis for adaptive management. This will provide additional encouragement and feedback to sponsors and increase the likelihood of having measured outcomes to report from the current funding cycle. Overall, it does appear some progress is being made on monitoring, evaluation, and results reporting. A number of projects are currently starting regional monitoring plans that we expect will provide substantive data and analysis within the next few years that will enhance the Program's overall M&E efforts. These regional efforts include the Upper Columbia United Tribe’s Wildlife Management and Wildlife Evaluation Plan and WDFW’s regional plan (Schroeder et al. 20084). We describe the prospects for these regional M&E efforts in more detail below.

**Results reporting: inconsistencies between proposals and annual reports**

The level of results reporting in proposals and annual reports varies, and there are opportunities to strengthen each. Annual reporting has tended to focus on repeating project justifications, anticipated future benefits, and current activities. In proposals for continued O&M, biological outcomes of previous management are the best argument for continued funding. To the degree these results are included in reports, improvements will be documented over time and future proposals can be prepared more easily and persuasively. Individual projects may or may not require formal monitoring depending on the type of project, its scale, and if other monitoring efforts are covering the lands or populations involved.

The ISRP could provide sponsors with guidelines for annual reports that emphasize this type of reporting.

**Prospects for regional RM&E**

The ISRP has addressed this issue frequently, including:

Include a monitoring and evaluation component in HEP-based management projects or programs that routinely assesses the expected versus actual responses of both target and non-target wildlife species (ISRP 1999-45, cited in ISRP 2005-14).

A good model for probabilistic sampling and inventory of terrestrial components of large subbasins should be identified. Develop a general protocol for probabilistic selection of terrestrial monitoring sites and include in a basin-wide plan or append to the subbasin plans (ISRP 2005-14).

When monitoring of project effectiveness is to be incorporated into a broader-scale monitoring effort, that project should already be underway, or planned to continue through the proposed projects’ timeline. Evidence that such collaboration has been negotiated should be part of the project agreement (ISRP 2008-76).

The Program should include an explicit scientific research component designed to improve mitigation success and adaptive management, with a priority to research designed to evaluate the effectiveness of habitat measures’ impacts on wildlife populations and their ecology (ISRP 1997-17, cited in ISRP 2005-14).

Again, in this review, we suggest that wildlife goals might be best served by regional monitoring programs that apply to numerous projects. The HEP team model of having a designated team that conducts HEP appraisals program-wide might be applied to biological monitoring. For example, the Upper Columbia United Tribe’s (UCUT) Wildlife Management and Wildlife Evaluation Plan (UMWEP) have begun to conduct monitoring of biological response to habitat restoration for the UCUT member tribes. This approach may be a solution to the effectiveness monitoring needs of programs where sufficiently similar habitats are under management by several entities or staffs, for example WDFW’s shrub steppe units. Monitoring could be conducted by project proponents or contracted out using the best methodologies for the region, species, and project objectives involved. Standardization beyond this level is likely problematic, although the conceptual underpinnings previously elaborated by the ISRP could guide programs.

The UCUT regional M&E approach is a good start because it monitors vegetation and a suite of vertebrates that are appropriate for detecting habitat/wildlife responses. This approach is consistent with previous ISRP recommendations that species should be selected for monitoring that would be expected to show responses at the project scale. Most often this is at a relatively small spatial scale and initially, at a short time scale (ISRP 2006-4a). In addition, we have noted that the time lag between implementation and measurable response in a project might be partially dealt with by selection of short-lived resident focal species to monitor “necessary but not sufficient” interim changes in the direction intended (ISRP 2008-7).

However, further deliberation is needed on what level of monitoring (or reporting) is needed for focal species, particularly game species. The ISRP understands that animals range beyond the boundaries of most wildlife management areas and monitoring populations may be the responsibility of the states, federal agencies, or tribes. How the Program’s projects use information from or supply information to those larger scale monitoring efforts needs to be made more transparent in proposals and management plans. The Program should initiate a series of meetings with State, Tribal, and Federal programs that monitor wildlife populations to identify opportunities to collaborate in these efforts to the benefit of all parties.

The WDFW wildlife monitoring guideline document (Schroeder et al. 2008, attached to proposal) is another example of regional monitoring techniques, and the ISRP suggests it as one model for Wildlife M&E in the Fish and Wildlife Program.

Some projects expanded the basic vegetative data needed for HEP for their habitat monitoring without application of the HEP analysis. This approach might be explored by other projects aiming to optimize their HEP and effectiveness monitoring efforts. Among projects using and/or expanding HEP vegetation measurements as a component of effectiveness monitoring are Logan Valley (20000900), Iskuulpa (199506001), and Rainwater (200002600) projects.

Independent Scientific Review Panel

Retrospective Report 1997 – 2005

ISRP 2005-14

August 31, 2005

Wildlife Monitoring and Evaluation

Habitat Evaluation Procedure (HEP) makes sense as a method for defining losses of land and of habitat. It also makes sense as a conceptual approach to wildlife habitat acquisition and restoration. Indeed, the wildlife portion of the Council’s FWP is based on the HEP concept, and land acquisitions are pursued and accounted for using the HEP currency. While the ISRP does not contest this approach or the policy decisions behind it, we continue to have concerns that the monitoring and evaluation of wildlife projects and programs should not rest solely on a HEP-based analysis.

**Recommendation:** The ISRP recommends that HEP-based management projects or programs should include a monitoring and evaluation component that routinely assesses the expected versus actual responses of both target and non-target wildlife species.